

PSC DECIDES 314 AND 816 AREA CODE CASES

Jefferson City (October 24, 2000)---The Missouri Public Service Commission has determined that an overlay should be implemented in the current 314 area code (eastern Missouri) and the current 816 area code (western Missouri) as a means of alleviating a projected exhaustion of telephone prefixes in those two areas in Missouri. At the same time, the Commission has ordered that certain number conservation measures be implemented as a means of delaying the need for future area codes in the state.

With the overlay relief, two new area codes will be assigned and used, one in the current 314 area code, the other in the current 816 area code. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) will designate the new area code numbers. The overlay is expected to be implemented in 2001 in the 314 area code and sometime in 2002 in the 816 area code.

An overlay will not change a customer's current telephone number. However, when the new area codes are introduced, customers will need to dial ten digits (the area code + the seven digit telephone number) for local calling. An overlay does not change what is a local call and what is a toll call. With an overlay, customers getting a new telephone number could have an area code different from their neighbor and if they order a second telephone line into their home, they could potentially have a different area code for the second line.

As part of the Commission's order, a technical and planning committee will be formed for each area code. These committees will file an overlay implementation plan for the 314 and 816 area codes. The committees will make recommendations on when permissive dialing and mandatory dialing should begin. An overlay implementation plan for the current 314 area code is to be filed within 30 days. In the current 816 area code, the implementation plan is to be filed within 60 days.

Based upon a thorough review of testimony filed in this case as well as evidence received from customers at local public hearings held in Chesterfield, St. Louis, O'Fallon, Kansas City, Blue Springs and St. Joseph, the Commission determined it was in the public interest to order an overlay.

The Commission noted in its order that local hearing support for the overlay relief method was generally based on avoiding the costs and confusion of requiring customers to change their telephone numbers which would be required if a geographic split relief method was chosen; that an overlay would avoid dividing communities of interest compared to artificial divisions that might result from a

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geographic split; and that moving to required ten-digit local dialing with an overlay avoids confusion in knowing when to dial seven digits versus ten digits.

The Commission further noted: “Another concern that was expressed at the local public hearings was that any relief plan should provide long-term relief to reduce, limit or avoid costs and confusion associated with implementing any NPA (area code) relief plan and a desire that further NPA relief should not be required for a significant period of time.” With no telephone number conservation efforts, the overlay relief is projected to last approximately six years in each area code. Telephone number conservation measures would extend the time before area code relief would be needed again.

The Commission has ordered reclamation of numbering resources as a means of delaying the need for new area codes in Missouri. Reclamation of numbering resources requires carriers to return unused numbers to the North American Numbering Plan Administrator (NeuStar, Inc.) or to a pooling administrator. The PSC Staff has also been directed to audit carriers to determine how many numbers the companies are holding and how many are not being used.

The Commission has also directed the PSC Staff and the telecommunications industry to begin planning and preparing for 1,000 block number pooling and sequential numbering. These measures should also delay the need for new area codes in Missouri. Previously, telephone numbers were assigned and issued to service providers in blocks of 10,000. The Commission and the FCC are working to implement assignment of numbers in blocks of 1,000 in the 314 and 816 area codes, in order to reduce the number of assigned but unused numbers.

The Commission’s order also directs parties to implement rate center consolidation in the Kansas City metropolitan area in an effort to conserve telephone numbers. Rate center consolidation was successfully completed very recently in the St. Louis metropolitan area for the current 314 area code. Rate center consolidation reduces the number of blocks of telephone numbers a carrier needs to serve an area code.

The Commission noted in its order: “The Commission’s obligation is to act in order that numbering resources are made available on an efficient and timely basis, in order that all carriers have the numbering resources they need to compete, and in order that no consumer is denied a choice of carriers or services based on the unavailability of numbering resources.”

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